conservatism, especially when liberalism appears to be on the
defensive in the United States. On the
other hand, Fass’s study represents a
consensus approach to history, which
accounts for resistance but somewhat
diminishes it, and discounts struggle,
ignoring conflict altogether. With the
yet unresolved problems of inequality
plaguing African-Americans and
women, and the reactionary responses
to the ever-increasing numbers of
Latino immigrants, does liberalism
work? Does consensus history truly
reflect the experiences of these groups
in our political economy?

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Kathleen E. McCrone. Playing the
Game: Sport and the Physical
Emancipation of English Women, 1870-
1914. Lexington: The University

As Kathleen McCrone points out,
the great eighteenth-century feminist
Mary Wollstonecraft knew that the
“liberation of women’s bodies” was
essential to the wider emancipation of
women. That there is a connection
between that emancipation and the
emergence of women’s right to par-
ticipate in sport is the thesis of her
meticulously researched study.

Playing the Game provides a full
account of the development of
women’s sport at the Oxbridge
women’s colleges and at secondary
schools for middle-class girls. While
it covers some of the same ground as
the work of other scholars (for ex-
ample, that of Sheila Fletcher), Mc-
Crone provides a new dimension
because her study goes beyond an ex-
amination of the influence of sport on
the education of girls and young
women to include the involvement of
adult women in individual and team
sports, and the discussion of the con-
nection between the rise of women’s
sport and dress reform. In all of these
areas, Playing the Game provides the
reader with a wealth of information.

McCrone’s discussion of the
development of physical education in
girls’ schools and of the rise of training
schools for physical-training mistres-
ses is of special importance from the
point of view of the history of educa-
tion. On this subject, she offers some
interesting and unexpected con-
clusions. She points out that whereas
in boys’ schools sport was not usually
perceived as part of what she calls “a
wider system of physical education”
(p. 101), in progressive girls’ schools
it was. Thus, the rise of physical
education as a profession devoted to
the training and development of the
body owes more to educators of girls
than of boys. The history of the physi-
cal training institutes is also important
to the story of the development of
professions for women. Being a
physical-training mistress was one
such new occupation. As McCrone
puts it: “The rise of the physical
education mistress and institutions to
train her represented the concession to
women of a right to a degree of body
control and to a respectable, well-paying career" (p. 121).

McCrone makes it clear in her introduction and throughout Playing the Game that she is concerned only with sport and the emancipation of the body as it affected middle and upper-class girls and women, and the treatment of that subject was clearly enough for one book. However, for this reviewer, the material in Playing the Game does raise some important questions concerning the importance of social class, questions McCrone might have considered. For example, we know from research done by historians like Laura Oren, Jane Lewis, Elizabeth Roberts, and Ellen Ross that working-class girls and women in the Victorian and Edwardian years suffered from physical debilitation that was even more serious than that of working-class men. McCrone provides a thorough analysis of the way in which the athletic woman challenged the dominant bourgeois Victorian stereotype of femininity, with its image of the ideal woman as fragile and passive. But the alteration of this class-based stereotype and the consequent recognition that ladies could be robust and vigorous may well have widened the gap between the experience of working-class women and those of the middle and upper classes. The fact that possibilities for liberating the female body applied only to a minority of privileged women in McCrone’s period could have played a more central role in Playing the Game.

In McCrone’s well-argued concluding chapter, she explores the connections between the feminist movement and women’s sport that emerge from her study. As she points out, they were indirect, in that few women involved in sport were active feminists, but they were nonetheless important. First, widening opportunities in sport were often a consequence of women’s agitation in other areas, and second, sport contributed in its turn to “emancipating females from physical and psychological bondage and to altering the image of ideal womanhood” (pp. 276-7). And paradoxically, she notes, even though most sportswomen shied away from active feminist involvement, the athletic “mannish” woman was a favourite target of antifeminists.

In conclusion then, Playing the Game, with its careful research and its breadth of information, makes a valuable contribution to the history of middle-class women. The book will be of importance to historians of feminism and of women’s education, and as well, to those interested in the history of sport, and in sport itself.

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Theresa Richardson’s wide-ranging, but richly documented, historical study of the mental hygiene movement